

Open Report on behalf of the Executive Director of Children's Services

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| Report to: | Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee |
| Date: | 7 September 2012 |
| Subject: | Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services peer review |

Summary:

To provide an overview of the three day Sector Led Peer Challenge, which took place in July 2012 within Lincolnshire County Council Children's Services.

Actions Required:

That the Committee be asked to consider and comment on the findings of the peer review.

1. Background

1.1 As part of the Sector Led Improvement Initiative which was initially outlined in the LGAs document 'Taking the Lead' in February 2011, Local Government are now committed to driving forward the outlined principles behind self-improving systems.

1.2 The East Midlands Region are very much at the forefront of this with the nine Local Authorities working together as an early adopter of the new sector-led improvement approach. Local Authorities within this region have developed a particular interest in building strong local partnerships and joint development programmes to create the culture and capacity for peer challenge and support and are in agreement for utilising a co-ordination of activities to achieve the most efficient and effective outcomes. In particular these activities will include Unannounced Safeguarding Assurance visits, Regional Improvement and Succession Planning Activities and Peer Challenge and Review visits.

1.3 Councillor Mrs Bradwell is the East Midlands Children's Improvement Lead and chairs the regional improvement Board which is responsible for implementing a systematic, intelligence led and sustainable approach to self-improvement: As regional lead, Councillor Bradwell attends the national Children's Improvement Board providing an important link to and communication with East Midland Authorities to raise the profile of sector led improvement. The four priorities for this regional work are: -

- To promote and support peer challenge so that all councils are involved: this is critical to building a culture of trust and mutual support;

- To reduce the number of councils subject to improvement notices;
- To promote stronger ownership of self- improvement by the sector, including councillors and chief executives;
- to Support councils to deal with the impact of new policy developments.

1.4 On the 9th – 11th July, Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Children’s Services volunteered to host the second regional peer review, led by the Corporate Director for Children, Families and Cultural Services Anthony May from Nottinghamshire County Council. Prior to the visit, discussion was held with Lincolnshire Director of Children’s Services to confirm the reviews Key Line of Enquiry.

To examine effectiveness of strategies and partnerships in narrowing the gap between:

- Children eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their peers across all education phases from early years to 19 years
- Children who have special educational needs/a disability and their peers
- Identified vulnerable groups and their peers.

1.5 In order to assess the range of service areas sufficiently, the Lead Reviewer, Anthony May, selected a small group of colleagues from within the region who could offer and apply their knowledge and expertise whilst on site. Members included Cllr David Mellen (Nottingham City Council), Lesley Hagger (Leicestershire County Council), Tim O’Neill (Nottingham City Council), John Slater (Nottinghamshire County Council), supported by Daniel Routledge Schools Development Support Agency (SDSA).

1.6 During the peer review process the inspecting team had visits scheduled at a series of venues within the county with a range of staff members from LCC Children’s Service, CfBT, dedicated (head) teachers and NHS Services. The team discussed a variety of topics including teenage pregnancy, youth offending, the Families Working Together programme, fostering and adoption and leaving care services.

1.7 A number of service users contributed directly to the review, ranging from; children leaving care, participants in the Joint University Mentoring Programme (JUMP) and those involved in the Families Working Together Programme. The broad range of participants enabled a clear overview of the services being delivered and provided an extensive level of information from which the Peer Challenge Team could base their final judgements.

2. Conclusion

2.1 The process was found to be highly beneficial to both authorities, with participants from Lincolnshire commenting that the opportunity to discuss current and innovative ideas with neighbouring authorities was extremely useful and provided opportunity for reflection as well as sharing of good practice.

2.2 Service Users in particular commented on their enjoyment at sharing their experiences of LCC services and welcomed the opportunity to describe their journey and positive outcomes.

2.3 The review concluded on the 11th July at which point the Peer Review Team provided feedback and recommendations to the Directors Management Team (DMT). The final presentation provided a comprehensive overview of both the strengths and future opportunities for Children’s Services.

2.4 The review team also concurred with our most recent Ofsted judgement which described Lincolnshire County Council’s Children’s Services as ‘Outstanding’ and stated that *“over the visit period they had witnessed displays of excellence. The authority and staff who work within it should be proud of their achievements both collaboratively as well as on an individual level.”*

2.5 For a more detailed report of the Peer Review concluding recommendations please see attached **Appendix A – Peer Review Letter of Recommendations.**

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Appendices

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| These are listed below and attached at the back of the report | |
| Appendix A | Peer Review Letter of Recommendations |

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Jessica Spry, who can be contacted on 01522 552772 or jessica.spry@lincolnshire.gov.uk.